DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 264 725 FL 015 379

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TITLE The Use of Reformulation in Teaching Writing to FSL Students.
PUB DATE 84
NOTE 9p.; In: Carleton Papers in Applied Language Studies, Volume I (FL 015 370).
PUB TYPE Guides - Classroom Use - Guides (For Teachers) (052)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Applied Linguistics; Classroom Techniques; *French; Higher Education; Introductory Courses; *Revision (Written Composition); Second Language Instruction; *Teaching Methods; *Writing Instruction; *Writing Processes
IDENTIFIERS Carleton University ON

ABSTRACT

In the teaching of creative writing to students of French as a second language, the use of the reformulation technique has proved effective. The writing process is divided into stages: selection of a topic, discussion with peers, writing of a first draft, revision with peers, submission to the instructor, further revision, editing and proofreading, and sharing of the final copy with the class. For the reformulation part of the process, the teacher rewrites the students' compositions, presents them with their own and the rewritten compositions for comparison, and asking them to observe and list any significant differences between the two versions. The students direct their attention to vocabulary selection, syntactic choices, cohesive devices, discourse functions, overall organization, and stance toward the reader. Then they focus on three issues: significant changes, how the changes are made, and the effects of the changes. The technique is successful in that it generates motivation by personalizing instruction, and offering the students options among techniques. It also makes students aware that writing does not express all the meaning one intends. (MSE)

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The Use of Reformulation in Teaching Writing to FSL Students

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In the teaching of creative writing to beginning students of French as a Second Language, the use of the reformulation technique (as defined by Cohen 1982, 1983) has proved to be particularly effective. After describing the context in which I have employed it and after explaining the procedures of reformulation, I will report on its effects on the students' writing. I will point out the patterns which emerged in the development of better writers and poorer writers. In the last part of this paper I will discuss reasons for the effectiveness of this technique.

In these classes, the creative writing consists of a series of stages spread over several short sessions. Learners select a topic, discuss it with peers, write a first draft which they revise with the help of these peers, then submit it to their instructor for a first reading. After revising again according to further suggestions, editing and proofreading, students hand in a final copy which is published and shared with the rest of the class. An important part of learning how to write takes

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place during the discussion prior to the writing as well as during the revision process and the sharing session. This learning occurs through conferencing with fellow students, discussing problems, revising processes with them and finally through appreciating or criticizing compositions after they have been shared. Therefore, learning to write takes place primarily through the medium of talk.

Learning Procedure

The reformulation procedure consists of rewriting the students' entire compositions. Secondly, it consists of presenting the learners with their own composition as well as the rewritten piece, and finally, asking them to observe and list any signifigant differences between the two versions. As they move through the pieces, students focus on three key questions:

1) Is there a signifigant change?
2) How is it made?
3) What is its effect?

When faced with this task for the first time however, weaker students need further guidance as to the focus of their comparisons, so it is suggested that they direct their attention towards elements such as:

a -selection of vocabulary
b -choice of syntactic structures
c -cohesive devices
d -discourse functions
e -overall organization
f -stance towards the reader.

Reformulation Procedure

These six aspects of the writing are the main elements in which changes are made during reformulation. a) Changes in the selection of vocabulary may modify the degree of formality, precision and conciseness depending on the type of

task at hand. In some cases for example, this type of change may consist of a systematic transposition of all lexical items which are associated with spoken language into those which are associated with formal written language.

b) Changes in syntactic structures may consist of using more complex sentences, varying complex and less complex structures and ordering these grammatical patterns to stress meaning. In the reformulated piece students are provided with techniques for avoiding repetition of the same structures. The syntactic structures employed by the teacher in order to combine and improve the learners' simple sentences include both these which the students may already know but have failed to use and those which they don't know. It is interesting to note here that this implicit teaching of sentence structure produces immediate results as students notice the new grammatical patterns and learn about their underlying rules when they attempt to imitate these patterns. For instance, in one of my classes relative clauses introduced by 'qui' and 'que', which were not previously taught, began to appear in all the students' writing immediately after they were introduced in the first reformulated process.

c) Changes regarding cohesive devices are related to the use of intra and intersentential markers of cohesion. In most cases, students at the beginning level fail to use connectors, conjunctions, reference, etc. The addition of such cohesive devices makes the learners progressively aware of the need for greater cohesion in writing.

d) Changes regarding discourse functions consist in employing more sophisticated means of realizing functions such as questioning, defining, hypothesizing, etc. In reformulating students' attempts to realize these (attempts which often result in unwanted tone and effect or shift in register,) the teacher provides better ways of realizing them.

e) Changes in overall organization focus on the lay-out of the piece (title, introduction, conclusion, paragraphing,

etc.,) and aim at developing students' awareness of writing conventions. This might consist of adding a title or an introductory sentence for example or replacing "fin" (the end) by a concluding sentence. As well, these changes affect the organization of different parts and ideas in relation to the whole piece.

f) Changes in the written text in terms of stance towards the reader stress the type of information required by the reader in order to understand the text. Sometimes, for example, details in the text must be elaborated to form separate units.

During the reading and observing sessions described earlier, all students gained insights into all these different aspects of the written language, which they then attempted to transfer to the writing of their subsequent compositions. In order to find out if there was any transfer I observed and noted changes in student papers. The following chart shows categories where instances of change were observed, as well as the percentage of students who made such changes.

The chart shows that all students have made changes in several areas which are discussed below. However, it is of course difficult to claim that they result solely from reformulation. In their later essays, students showed significant improvement in the area of vocabulary and they have particularly become aware of the degrees of formality. They have been sensitized to appropriateness and register. They have also acquired new and more complex structures which allow them to express and combine a greater number of ideas per sentence rather than produce a series of simple statements. As well, they employed markers of cohesion in order to explicitly indicate the relationship between sentences and ideas. Finally, they improved the lay-out of their pieces and their overall organization. All these elements result in a product whose quality differs greatly from the writing they initially produced.

Categories in which Differences were Observed:	*Percentage of Students:*
a) Selection of Vocabulary	
- precision	50%
- conciseness	50%
- degree of formality/informality, differences in register	100%
b) Syntactic Structures	
- use of more complex structures (adjective clauses and phrases; adverb clauses and phrases; noun clauses; embedding)	100%
- ordering and varying complex and less complex structures	30%
c) Markers of Cohesion	
- within sentences	100%
- across sentences	80%
- across paragraphs (coordination and contrast, conjunctions, pronouns, lexical items, etc.)	100%
d) Discourse Functions	
- identifying different and better means of performing functions such as questioning, defining, hypothesizing, etc.	20%
e) Overall Organization	
- organization of different parts and ideas of the piece	100%
- lay-out of the piece (title, introduction, conclusion, paragraphing, etc.)	100%
f) Stance Towards Reader	
- awareness of audience, providing extra information, etc.	20%

Characteristics of Better and Poorer Writers

Noticeable differences emerged between the better writers and the poorer writers:

1) Better writers tended to incorporate a great number of new elements into their subsequent compositions whereas poorer writers only used a limited number at any one time although they were exposed to as many differences as the better ones.

2) Better writers tended to use new structures in a variety of appropriate ways while poorer students often overused the ones they had acquired.

3) Better writers showed improvement at all levels whereas poorer ones' progress was limited to two areas: the syntactic and lexical.

In general, these differences seemed to emerge from differences in attitude towards the reformulated pieces. Better writers perceived them as examples of more generalized principles which allowed them to feel more exploratory with language. Poorer writers focused on the models as such and simply attempted to reproduce them. As well, better writers perceived the reformulated piece as a whole and were therefore able to abstract more global features (such as attitude to the reader for example). Poorer writers focused on surface level features, and consequently could only improve at levels which were obvious to them (vocabulary and syntax).

Discussion

The effectiveness of this technique is due to several factors. First of all, it generates a great deal of motivation because it sets up a personalized reading task during which the students read well written texts based on their own experience and their own writing. An alternative to reformulating their writing, which consists of presenting them with pieces writ-

ten by native speakers on the same topic, does not stimulate them in such a manner.

Furthermore, students are offered models of syntactic and lexical choices as well as choices of style, appropriateness and rhetorical functions. This is not possible to do by simply identifying their syntactic or lexical errors or by rephrasing isolated phrases or sentences. In the latter case, the student's final copy consists of a mixture of teacher and student writing, a mixture which is more likely to puzzle the learner than to offer him appropriate models.

As well, reformulation tends to make students aware that their writing doesn't express all of the meaning that they intend. In the reformulated version, students are given linguistic tools used by a native speaker to help them express their intended meaning. Some of these tools are new to them, some of them are not; in the latter case students have just failed to put them to use.

Other reasons for the effectiveness of this technique are that learners can diagnose areas which need improving by comparing the two versions. They are also given the opportunity to assess the level of writing proficiency they have reached, compared to native fluency. This type of self-evaluation appears to be more meaningful than the grade received.

In conclusion, it seems to me that although there are differences between better writers and poorer writers, all students have benefited from the use of the reformulation approach and that the results obtained over a short period of time surpass results I have achieved with other students through any type of explicit or direct instruction in teaching creative writing. I suppose that this method would be even more valuable in dealing with advanced students whose writing is quite close to the proficiency of native writers, but it certainly is quite an effective approach which maximizes

beginners' awareness of the written language and of the appropriate directions their writing ought to take.

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